

02.12.2023–20.01.2024

## ...the obtrusive presence of an absence...

Neil Clements & Irina Gheorghe  
Fri–Sat 12–5pm or by appointment  
closed weekend 30–31.12

Lost and contested histories are reconstructed—crates inhabit the space, marking a sense of mobility, both revealing and obscuring work.

A set of scores for a performance not yet completed—notebooks hold text in multiple languages, slowly breaking down, becoming abstract markers.

'...the obtrusive presence of an absence...' is an exhibition bringing together new work by Neil Clements & Irina Gheorghe. Working across installation, painting and performance, and united by long-term negotiations of histories, times and places — the exhibition is animated by fundamental questions of *what is there* and maybe more importantly *what is not*.

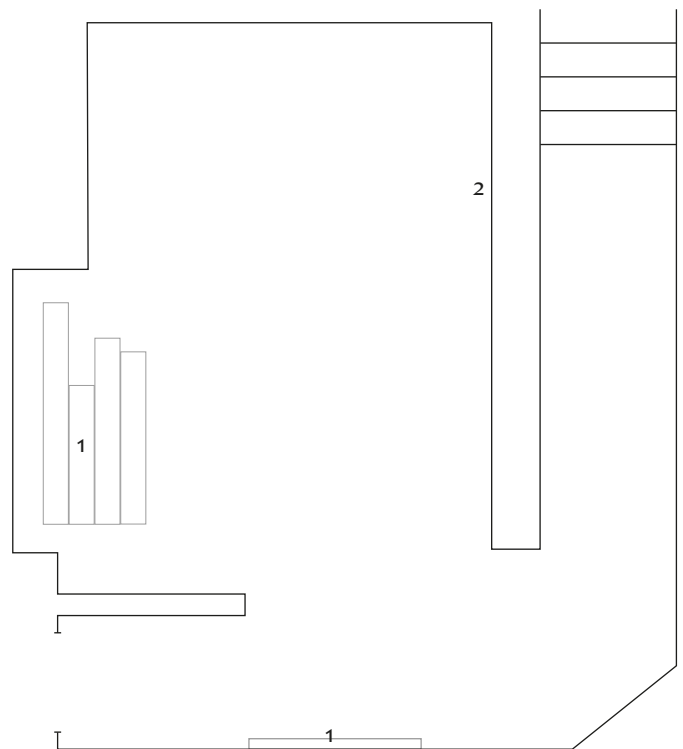
Clements is presenting the body of work *Riser (Stranmillis, December 1960)* produced over the last five years and taking as a starting point the only known photograph of the Belfast iteration of the exhibition 'West Coast Hard Edge: Four Abstract Classicists'. This exhibition marked the first appearance on Northern Irish soil of postwar American abstraction.

The exhibition was organised by United States Information Service, and Clements is particularly engaged with how the works of four artists became a signifier for a set of aesthetic freedoms afforded by free market capitalism. The work itself consists of facsimiles of each of the paintings from this exhibition. These have been reconstructed via an associative research method pulling together scattered documents. The resultant artworks substitute canvas for laser cut and painted treadplate, with the treads breaking the flat pictorial plane. Clements has long used this material and relates this to how artists have historically made claims for the ownership of specific industrial materials in a manner akin to corporate patenting. In this display the majority of the Clements' works are neatly enclosed in four crates — one per artist — in a nod to the mobility of these works and their use as transportable markers of an ideology.

Gheorghe's work *Scores for the End of the Present* has been produced on site from an accretion of materials that have become synonymous with the artist. Grounded in performance, Gheorghe's practice has long been invested in an engagement with rules — such as earlier work such as *Protect your Heart at Work* (2012), a humorous performance and video skewering Soviet instructional videos updating them for an immaterial workplace made within the collaborative practice The Bureau of Melodramatic Research with Alina Popa (1982–2019). Tape is used for its temporary nature pointing to its choreographic use both in theatre and day-to-day life. First used in the work *Transelectric* (2015) made for Salonul de Proiecte, Bucharest in which a geometric form was marked on the floor using a plain black duct tape, the artist's use of the material has now developed into an almost painterly use attentive to the material nature of the different tapes. Amongst the tape marks sit a number of notebooks in which the artist makes elaborate plans for her performances scripting both the language and the movement. The materials here are an amalgam of past and future projects working towards a more open-ended visual language exploring techniques for estranging the lived experience of the 'here' and 'now'. This work precedes a new performance relating to these themes to take place on the final day of the exhibition on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January.

The idiot gives the lie to the belief that signifiers designate something and not *nothing*. To think is to think from the position of the idiot: to observe the shattering of an imaginary identity. The idiot makes the *me* suddenly appear as the obtrusive presence of an absence, like a hole filled in. The simpleton shows me that I count for nothing. If I am going to think, to escape idiocy, then I have to say, I think in me. I identify my image as an image of absence.

The title is taken from the above quote from the philosopher Alexi Kukuljevic's 2017 book *Liquidation World: On the Art of Living Absently* in which he explores artistic practices that map the utterly disoriented subject of modernity. Kukuljevic has very generously agreed to write a new text to sit alongside the exhibition, which will be included in a new publication to be launched on the 20<sup>th</sup> January. Alongside this the publication will feature installation views and a discussion between the artists and the curator Benjamin Fallon.



- 1 *Riser (Stranmillis, December 1960; after Karl Benjamin, Lorser Feitelson, Frederick Hammersley & John McLaughlin)*  
Neil Clements 2023
- 2 *Scores for the End of the Present*  
Irina Gheorghe 2023